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GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE SOMPNOUR'S TALE

THE PROLOGUE.

The Sompnour in his stirrups high he stood,
Upon this Friar his hearte was so wood,* *furious
That like an aspen leaf he quoke* for ire: *quaked, trembled
"Lordings," quoth he, "but one thing I desire;
I you beseech, that of your courtesy,
Since ye have heard this false Friar lie,
As suffer me I may my tale tell
This Friar boasteth that he knoweth hell,
And, God it wot, that is but little wonder,
Friars and fiends be but little asunder.
For, pardie, ye have often time heard tell,
How that a friar ravish'd was to hell
In spirit ones by a visioun,
And, as an angel led him up and down,
To shew him all the paines that there were,
In all the place saw he not a frere;
Of other folk he saw enough in woe.
Unto the angel spake the friar tho;* *then
'Now, Sir,' quoth he, 'have friars such a grace,
That none of them shall come into this place?'
'Yes' quoth the angel; 'many a millioun:'
And unto Satanas he led him down.
'And now hath Satanas,' said he, 'a tail
Broader than of a carrack<1> is the sail.
Hold up thy tail, thou Satanas,' quoth he,
'Shew forth thine erse, and let the friar see
Where is the nest of friars in this place.'
And *less than half a furlong way of space* *immediately* <2>
Right so as bees swarmen out of a hive,
Out of the devil's erse there gan to drive
A twenty thousand friars *on a rout.* *in a crowd*
And throughout hell they swarmed all about,
And came again, as fast as they may gon,
And in his erse they creeped every one:
He clapt his tail again, and lay full still.
This friar, when he looked had his fill
Upon the torments of that sorry place,

His spirit God restored of his grace
Into his body again, and he awoke;
But natheless for feare yet he quoke,
So was the devil's erse aye in his mind;
That is his heritage, *of very kind* *by his very nature*
God save you alle, save this cursed Frere;
My prologue will I end in this mannere.

Notes to the Prologue to the Sompnour's Tale

1. Carrack: A great ship of burden used by the Portuguese; the name is from the Italian, "cargare," to load

2. In less than half a furlong way of space: immediately; literally, in less time than it takes to walk half a furlong (110 yards).

THE TALE.

Lordings, there is in Yorkshire, as I guess,
A marshy country called Holderness,
In which there went a limitour about
To preach, and eke to beg, it is no doubt.
And so befell that on a day this frere
Had preached at a church in his mannere,
And specially, above every thing,
Excited he the people in his preaching
To trentals, <1> and to give, for Godde's sake,
Wherewith men mighte holy houses make,
There as divine service is honour'd,
Not there as it is wasted and devour'd,
Nor where it needeth not for to be given,
As to possessioners, <2> that may liven,
Thanked be God, in wealth and abundance.
"Trentals," said he, "deliver from penance
Their friendes' soules, as well old as young,
Yea, when that they be hastily y-sung, —
Not for to hold a priest jolly and gay,
He singeth not but one mass in a day.
"Deliver out," quoth he, "anon the souls.
Full hard it is, with flesh-hook or with owls* *awls
To be y-clawed, or to burn or bake: <3>
Now speed you hastily, for Christe's sake."
And when this friar had said all his intent,
With qui cum patre<4> forth his way he went,
When folk in church had giv'n him what them lest;* *pleased
He went his way, no longer would he rest,
With scrip and tipped staff, *y-tucked high:* *with his robe tucked
In every house he gan to pore* and pry, up high* *peer
And begged meal and cheese, or elles corn.

His fellow had a staff tipped with horn,
A pair of tables* all of ivory, *writing tablets
And a pointel* y-polish'd fetisly,** *pencil **daintily
And wrote alway the names, as he stood;
Of all the folk that gave them any good,
Askaunce* that he woulde for them pray. *see note <5>
"Give us a bushel wheat, or malt, or rey,* *rye
A Godde's kichel,* or a trip** of cheese, *little cake<6> **scrap
Or elles what you list, we may not chese;* *choose
A Godde's halfpenny, <6> or a mass penny;
Or give us of your brawn, if ye have any;
A dagon* of your blanket, leve dame, *remnant
Our sister dear, — lo, here I write your name,—
Bacon or beef, or such thing as ye find."
A sturdy harlot* went them aye behind, *manservant <7>
That was their hoste's man, and bare a sack,
And what men gave them, laid it on his back
And when that he was out at door, anon
He *planed away* the names every one, *rubbed out*
That he before had written in his tables:
He served them with nifles* and with fables. — *silly tales
"Nay, there thou liest, thou Sompnour," quoth the Frere.
"Peace," quoth our Host, "for Christe's mother dear;
Tell forth thy tale, and spare it not at all."
"So thrive I," quoth this Sompnour, "so I shall." —
So long he went from house to house, till he
Came to a house, where he was wont to be
Refreshed more than in a hundred places
Sick lay the husband man, whose that the place is,
Bed-rid upon a couche low he lay:
"Deus hic," quoth he; "O Thomas friend, good day," *God be here*
Said this friar, all courteously and soft.
"Thomas," quoth he, "God *yield it you,* full oft *reward you for*
Have I upon this bench fared full well,
Here have I eaten many a merry meal."
And from the bench he drove away the cat,
And laid adown his potent* and his hat, *staff <8>
And eke his scrip, and sat himself adown:
His fellow was y-walked into town
Forth with his knave,* into that hostelry *servant
Where as he shope* him that night to lie. *shaped, purposed
"O deare master," quoth this sicke man,
"How have ye fared since that March began?
I saw you not this fortenight and more."

"God wot," quoth he, "labour'd have I full sore;
And specially for thy salvation
Have I said many a precious orison,
And for mine other friendes, God them bless.
I have this day been at your church at mess,* *mass
And said sermon after my simple wit,
Not all after the text of Holy Writ;
For it is hard to you, as I suppose,
And therefore will I teach you aye the glose.* *gloss, comment
Glosing is a full glorious thing certain,
For letter slayeth, as we clerkes* sayn. *scholars
There have I taught them to be charitable,
And spend their good where it is reasonable.
And there I saw our dame; where is she?"
"Yonder I trow that in the yard she be,"
Saide this man; "and she will come anon."
"Hey master, welcome be ye by Saint John,"
Saide this wife; "how fare ye heartily?"
This friar riseth up full courteously,
And her embraceth *in his armes narrow,* *closely
And kiss'th her sweet, and chirketh as a sparrow
With his lippes: "Dame," quoth he, "right well,
As he that is your servant every deal.* *whit
Thanked be God, that gave you soul and life,
Yet saw I not this day so fair a wife
In all the churche, God so save me,"
"Yea, God amend defaultes, Sir," quoth she;
"Algates* welcome be ye, by my fay." *always
"Grand mercy, Dame; that have I found alway.
But of your greate goodness, by your leave,
I woulde pray you that ye not you grieve,
I will with Thomas speak *a little throw:* *a little while*
These curates be so negligent and slow
To grope tenderly a conscience.
In shrift* and preaching is my diligence *confession
And study in Peter's wordes and in Paul's;
I walk and fishe Christian menne's souls,
To yield our Lord Jesus his proper rent;
To spread his word is alle mine intent."
"Now by your faith, O deare Sir," quoth she,
"Chide him right well, for sainte charity.
He is aye angry as is a pismire,* *ant
Though that he have all that he can desire,
Though I him wrie* at night, and make him warm, *cover

And ov'r him lay my leg and eke mine arm,
He groaneth as our boar that lies in sty:
Other disport of him right none have I,
I may not please him in no manner case."
"O Thomas, *je vous dis,* Thomas, Thomas, *I tell you*
This *maketh the fiend,* this must be amended. *is the devil's work*
Ire is a thing that high God hath defended,* *forbidden
And thereof will I speak a word or two."
"Now, master," quoth the wife, "ere that I go,
What will ye dine? I will go thereabout."
"Now, Dame," quoth he, "je vous dis sans doute, <9>
Had I not of a capon but the liver,
And of your white bread not but a shiver,* *thin slice
And after that a roasted pigge's head,
(But I would that for me no beast were dead,)
Then had I with you homely suffisance.
I am a man of little sustenance.
My spirit hath its fost'ring in the Bible.
My body is aye so ready and penible* *painstaking
To wake,* that my stomach is destroy'd. *watch
I pray you, Dame, that ye be not annoy'd,
Though I so friendly you my counsel shew;
By God, I would have told it but to few."
"Now, Sir," quoth she, "but one word ere I go;
My child is dead within these weeke's two,
Soon after that ye went out of this town."
"His death saw I by revelatioun,"
Said this friar, "at home in our dortour.* *dormitory <10>
I dare well say, that less than half an hour
Mter his death, I saw him borne to bliss
In mine vision, so God me wiss.* *direct
So did our sexton, and our fermerere,* *infirmary-keeper
That have been true friars fifty year, —
They may now, God be thanked of his love,
Make their jubilee, and walk above.<12>
And up I rose, and all our convent eke,
With many a teare trilling on my cheek,
Withoute noise or clattering of bells,
Te Deum was our song, and nothing else,
Save that to Christ I bade an orison,
Thanking him of my revelation.
For, Sir and Dame, truste me right well,
Our orisons be more effectuel,
And more we see of Christe's secret things,

Than *borel folk,* although that they be kings. *laymen*<13>
We live in povert', and in abstinence,
And borel folk in riches and dispence
Of meat and drink, and in their foul delight.
We have this worlde's lust* all in despight** * pleasure **contempt
Lazar and Dives lived diversely,
And diverse guerdon* hadde they thereby. *reward
Whoso will pray, he must fast and be clean,
And fat his soul, and keep his body lean
We fare as saith th' apostle; cloth* and food *clothing
Suffice us, although they be not full good.
The cleanness and the fasting of us freres
Maketh that Christ accepteth our prayeres.
Lo, Moses forty days and forty night
Fasted, ere that the high God full of might
Spake with him in the mountain of Sinai:
With empty womb* of fasting many a day *stomach
Received he the lawe, that was writ
With Godde's finger; and Eli,<14> well ye wit,* *know
In Mount Horeb, ere he had any speech
With highe God, that is our live's leech,* *physician, healer
He fasted long, and was in contemplance.
Aaron, that had the temple in governance,
And eke the other priestes every one,
Into the temple when they shoulde gon
To praye for the people, and do service,
They woulde drinken in no manner wise
No drinke, which that might them drunken make,
But there in abstinence pray and wake,
Lest that they died: take heed what I say —
But* they be sober that for the people pray — *unless
Ware that, I say — no more: for it sufficeth.
Our Lord Jesus, as Holy Writ deviseth,* *narrates
Gave us example of fasting and prayeres:
Therefore we mendicants, we sely* freres, *simple, lowly
Be wedded to povert' and continence,
To charity, humbless, and abstinence,
To persecution for righteousness,
To weeping, misericorde,* and to cleanness. *compassion
And therefore may ye see that our prayeres
(I speak of us, we mendicants, we freres),
Be to the highe God more acceptable
Than youres, with your feastes at your table.
From Paradise first, if I shall not lie,

Was man out chased for his gluttony,
And chaste was man in Paradise certain.
But hark now, Thomas, what I shall thee sayn;
I have no text of it, as I suppose,
But I shall find it in *a manner glose;* *a kind of comment*
That specially our sweet Lord Jesus
Spake this of friars, when he saide thus,
'Blessed be they that poor in spirit be'
And so forth all the gospel may ye see,
Whether it be liker our profession,
Or theirs that swimmen in possession;
Fy on their pomp, and on their gluttony,
And on their lewedness! I them defy.
Me thinketh they be like Jovinian,<15>
Fat as a whale, and walking as a swan;
All vinolent* as bottle in the spence;** *full of wine **store-room
Their prayer is of full great reverence;
When they for soules say the Psalm of David,
Lo, 'Buf' they say, Cor meum eructavit.<16>
Who follow Christe's gospel and his lore* *doctrine
But we, that humble be, and chaste, and pore,* *poor
Workers of Godde's word, not auditours?* *hearers
Therefore right as a hawk *upon a sours* *rising*
Up springs into the air, right so prayeres
Of charitable and chaste busy freres
Make their sours to Godde's eares two. *rise*
Thomas, Thomas, so may I ride or go,
And by that lord that called is Saint Ive,
N'ere thou our brother, shouldest thou not thrive; *see note <17>*
In our chapiter pray we day and night
To Christ, that he thee sende health and might,
Thy body for to *wielde hastily.* *soon be able to move freely*
"God wot," quoth he, "nothing thereof feel I;
So help me Christ, as I in fewe years
Have spended upon *divers manner freres* *friars of various sorts*
Full many a pound, yet fare I ne'er the bet;* *better
Certain my good have I almost beset:* *spent
Farewell my gold, for it is all ago."* *gone
The friar answer'd, "O Thomas, dost thou so?
What needest thou diverse friars to seech?* *seek
What needeth him that hath a perfect leech,* *healer
To seeken other leeches in the town?
Your inconstance is your confusioun.
Hold ye then me, or elles our convent,

To praye for you insufficient?
Thomas, that jape* it is not worth a mite; *jest
Your malady is *for we have too lite.* *because we have
Ah, give that convent half a quarter oats; too little*
And give that convent four and twenty groats;
And give that friar a penny, and let him go!
Nay, nay, Thomas, it may no thing be so.
What is a farthing worth parted on twelve?
Lo, each thing that is oned* in himselve *made one, united
Is more strong than when it is y-scatter'd.
Thomas, of me thou shalt not be y-flatter'd,
Thou wouldest have our labour all for nought.
The highe God, that all this world hath wrought,
Saith, that the workman worthy is his hire
Thomas, nought of your treasure I desire
As for myself, but that all our convent
To pray for you is aye so diligent:
And for to builde Christe's owen church.
Thomas, if ye will learne for to wirch,* *work
Of building up of churches may ye find
If it be good, in Thomas' life of Ind.<18>
Ye lie here full of anger and of ire,
With which the devil sets your heart on fire,
And chide here this holy innocent
Your wife, that is so meek and patient.
And therefore trow* me, Thomas, if thee lest,** *believe **please
Ne strive not with thy wife, as for the best.
And bear this word away now, by thy faith,
Touching such thing, lo, what the wise man saith:
'Within thy house be thou no lion;
To thy subjects do none oppression;
Nor make thou thine acquaintance for to flee.'
And yet, Thomas, eftsoones* charge I thee, *again
Beware from ire that in thy bosom sleeps,
Ware from the serpent, that so slily creeps
Under the grass, and stingeth subtilly.
Beware, my son, and hearken patiently,
That twenty thousand men have lost their lives
For striving with their lemans* and their wives. *mistresses
Now since ye have so holy and meek a wife,
What needeth you, Thomas, to make strife?
There is, y-wis,* no serpent so cruel, *certainly
When men tread on his tail nor half so fell,* *fierce
As woman is, when she hath caught an ire;

Very* vengeance is then all her desire. *pure, only
Ire is a sin, one of the greate seven,
Abominable to the God of heaven,
And to himself it is destruction.
This every lewed* vicar and parson *ignorant
Can say, how ire engenders homicide;
Ire is in sooth th' executor* of pride. *executioner
I could of ire you say so muche sorrow,
My tale shoulde last until to-morrow.
And therefore pray I God both day and ight,
An irous* man God send him little might. *passionate
It is great harm, and certes great pity
To set an irous man in high degree.
"Whilom* there was an irous potestate,** *once **judge<19>
As saith Senec, that during his estate* *term of office
Upon a day out rode knightes two;
And, as fortune would that it were so,
The one of them came home, the other not.
Anon the knight before the judge is brought,
That saide thus; 'Thou hast thy fellow slain,
For which I doom thee to the death certain.'
And to another knight commanded he;
'Go, lead him to the death, I charge thee.'
And happened, as they went by the way
Toward the place where as he should dey,* *die
The knight came, which men weened* had been dead *thought
Then thoughte they it was the beste rede* *counsel
To lead them both unto the judge again.
They saide, 'Lord, the knight hath not y-slain
His fellow; here he standeth whole alive.'
'Ye shall be dead,' quoth he, 'so may I thrive,
That is to say, both one, and two, and three.'
And to the firste knight right thus spake he:
'I damned thee, thou must algate* be dead: *at all events
And thou also must needes lose thine head,
For thou the cause art why thy fellow dieth.'
And to the thirde knight right thus he sayeth,
'Thou hast not done that I commanded thee.'
And thus he did do slay them alle three.
Irous Cambyses was eke dronkelew,* *a drunkard
And aye delighted him to be a shrew.* *vicious, ill-tempered
And so befell, a lord of his meinie,* *suite
That loved virtuous morality,
Said on a day betwixt them two right thus:

'A lord is lost, if he be vicious.
[An irous man is like a frantic beast,
In which there is of wisdom *none arrest*;] *no control*
And drunkenness is eke a foul record
Of any man, and namely* of a lord. *especially
There is full many an eye and many an ear
Awaiting on a lord, he knows not where. *watching
For Godde's love, drink more attemperly:* *temperately
Wine maketh man to lose wretchedly
His mind, and eke his limbes every one.'
'The reverse shalt thou see,' quoth he, 'anon,
And prove it by thine own experience,
That wine doth to folk no such offence.
There is no wine bereaveth me my might
Of hand, nor foot, nor of mine eyen sight.'
And for despite he dranke muche more
A hundred part* than he had done before, *times
And right anon this cursed irous wretch
This knighte's sone let* before him fetch, *caused
Commanding him he should before him stand:
And suddenly he took his bow in hand,
And up the string he pulled to his ear,
And with an arrow slew the child right there.
'Now whether have I a sicker* hand or non?'** *sure **not
Quoth he; 'Is all my might and mind agone?
Hath wine bereaved me mine eyen sight?'
Why should I tell the answer of the knight?
His son was slain, there is no more to say.
Beware therefore with lordes how ye play,* *use freedom
Sing placebo;<20> and I shall if I can,
But if it be unto a poore man: *unless
To a poor man men should his vices tell,
But not t' a lord, though he should go to hell.
Lo, irous Cyrus, thilke* Persian, *that
How he destroy'd the river of Gisen,<21>
For that a horse of his was drowned therein,
When that he wente Babylon to win:
He made that the river was so small,
That women mighte wade it *over all.* *everywhere
Lo, what said he, that so well teache can,
'Be thou no fellow to an irous man,
Nor with no wood* man walke by the way, *furious
Lest thee repent;' I will no farther say.
"Now, Thomas, leve* brother, leave thine ire, *dear

Thou shalt me find as just as is as squire;
Hold not the devil's knife aye at thine heaat;
Thine anger doth thee all too sore smart;* *pain
But shew to me all thy confession."
"Nay," quoth the sicke man, "by Saint Simon
I have been shriven* this day of my curate; *confessed
I have him told all wholly mine estate.
Needeth no more to speak of it, saith he,
But if me list of mine humility."
"Give me then of thy good to make our cloister,"
Quoth he, "for many a mussel and many an oyster,
When other men have been full well at ease,
Hath been our food, our cloister for to rese:* *raise, build
And yet, God wot, unneth* the foundement** *scarcely **foundation
Performed is, nor of our pavement
Is not a tile yet within our wones:* *habitation
By God, we owe forty pound for stones.
Now help, Thomas, for *him that harrow'd hell,* *Christ <22>
For elles must we oure bookes sell,
And if ye lack our predication,
Then goes this world all to destruction.
For whoso from this world would us bereave,
So God me save, Thomas, by your leave,
He would bereave out of this world the sun
For who can teach and worken as we conne?* *know how to do
And that is not of little time (quoth he),
But since Elijah was, and Elisee,* *Elisha
Have friars been, that find I of record,
In charity, y-thanked be our Lord.
Now, Thomas, help for sainte charity."
And down anon he set him on his knee,
The sick man waxed well-nigh wood* for ire, *mad
He woulde that the friar had been a-fire
With his false dissimulation.
"Such thing as is in my possession,"
Quoth he, "that may I give you and none other:
Ye say me thus, how that I am your brother."
"Yea, certes," quoth this friar, "yea, truste well;
I took our Dame the letter of our seal"<23>
"Now well," quoth he, "and somewhat shall I give
Unto your holy convent while I live;
And in thine hand thou shalt it have anon,
On this condition, and other none,
That thou depart* it so, my deare brother, *divide

That every friar have as much as other:
This shalt thou swear on thy profession,
Withoute fraud or cavillation."* *quibbling
"I swear it," quoth the friar, "upon my faith."
And therewithal his hand in his he lay'th;
"Lo here my faith, in me shall be no lack."
"Then put thine hand adown right by my back,"
Saide this man, "and grope well behind,
Beneath my buttock, there thou shalt find
A thing, that I have hid in privity."
"Ah," thought this friar, "that shall go with me."
And down his hand he launched to the clift,* *cleft
In hope for to finde there a gift.
And when this sicke man felte this frere
About his taile groping there and here,
Amid his hand he let the friar a fart;
There is no capel* drawing in a cart, *horse
That might have let a fart of such a soun'.
The friar up start, as doth a wood* lioun: *fierce
"Ah, false churl," quoth he, "for Godde's bones,
This hast thou in despite done for the nones:* *on purpose
Thou shalt abie* this fart, if that I may." *suffer for
His meinie,* which that heard of this affray, *servants
Came leaping in, and chased out the frere,
And forth he went with a full angry cheer* *countenance
And fetch'd his fellow, there as lay his store:
He looked as it were a wilde boar,
And grounde with his teeth, so was he wroth.
A sturdy pace down to the court he go'th,
Where as there wonn'd* a man of great honour, *dwelt
To whom that he was always confessour:
This worthy man was lord of that village.
This friar came, as he were in a rage,
Where as this lord sat eating at his board:
Unnethes* might the friar speak one word, *with difficulty
Till at the last he saide, "God you see."* *save
This lord gan look, and said, "Ben'dicite!
What? Friar John, what manner world is this?
I see well that there something is amiss;
Ye look as though the wood were full of thieves.
Sit down anon, and tell me what your grieve* is, *grievance, grief
And it shall be amended, if I may."
"I have," quoth he, "had a despite to-day,
God *yielde you,* adown in your village, *reward you

That in this world is none so poor a page,
That would not have abominatioun
Of that I have received in your town:
And yet ne grieveth me nothing so sore,
As that the olde churl, with lockes hoar,
Blasphemed hath our holy convent eke."
"Now, master," quoth this lord, "I you beseek" —
"No master, Sir," quoth he, "but servitour,
Though I have had in schoole that honour. <24>
God liketh not, that men us Rabbi call
Neither in market, nor in your large hall."
"No force," quoth he; "but tell me all your grief." *no matter*
Sir," quoth this friar, "an odious mischief
This day betid* is to mine order and me, *befallen
And so par consequence to each degree
Of holy churche, God amend it soon."
"Sir," quoth the lord, "ye know what is to doon:* *do
Distemp'r you not, ye be my confessour. *be not impatient*
Ye be the salt of th' earth, and the savour;
For Godde's love your patience now hold;
Tell me your grief." And he anon him told
As ye have heard before, ye know well what.
The lady of the house aye stiller sat,
Till she had hearde what the friar said,
"Hey, Godde's mother;" quoth she, "blissful maid,
Is there ought elles? tell me faithfully."
"Madame," quoth he, "how thinketh you thereby?"
"How thinketh me?" quoth she; "so God me speed,
I say, a churl hath done a churlish deed,
What should I say? God let him never the;* *thrive
His sicke head is full of vanity;
I hold him in *a manner phrenesy."* *a sort of frenzy*
"Madame," quoth he, "by God, I shall not lie,
But I in other wise may be awreke,* *revenged
I shall defame him *ov'r all there* I speak; *wherever
This false blasphemour, that charged me
To parte that will not departed be,
To every man alike, with mischance."
The lord sat still, as he were in a trance,
And in his heart he rolled up and down,
"How had this churl imaginatioun
To shewe such a problem to the frere.
Never ere now heard I of such mattere;
I trow* the Devil put it in his mind. *believe

In all arsmetrik* shall there no man find, *arithmetic
Before this day, of such a question.
Who shoulde make a demonstration,
That every man should have alike his part
As of the sound and savour of a fart?
O nice* proude churl, I shrew** his face. *foolish **curse
Lo, Sires," quoth the lord, "with harde grace,
Who ever heard of such a thing ere now?
To every man alike? tell me how.
It is impossible, it may not be.
Hey nice* churl, God let him never the.** *foolish **thrive
The rumbling of a fart, and every soun',
Is but of air reverberatioun,
And ever wasteth lite* and lite* away; *little
There is no man can deemen,* by my fay, *judge, decide
If that it were departed* equally. *divided
What? lo, my churl, lo yet how shrewedly* *impiously, wickedly
Unto my confessour to-day he spake;
I hold him certain a demoniac.
Now eat your meat, and let the churl go play,
Let him go hang himself a devil way!"
Now stood the lorde's squier at the board,
That carv'd his meat, and hearde word by word
Of all this thing, which that I have you said.
"My lord," quoth he, "be ye not *evil paid,* *displeased*
I coulde telle, for a gowne-cloth,* *cloth for a gown*
To you, Sir Friar, so that ye be not wrot,
How that this fart should even* dealed be *equally
Among your convent, if it liked thee."
"Tell," quoth the lord, "and thou shalt have anon
A gowne-cloth, by God and by Saint John."
"My lord," quoth he, "when that the weather is fair,
Withoute wind, or perturbing of air,
Let* bring a cart-wheel here into this hall, cause*
But looke that it have its spokes all;
Twelve spokes hath a cart-wheel commonly;
And bring me then twelve friars, know ye why?
For thirteen is a convent as I guess;<25>
Your confessor here, for his worthiness,
Shall *perform up* the number of his convent. *complete*
Then shall they kneel adown by one assent,
And to each spoke's end, in this mannere,
Full sadly* lay his nose shall a frere; *carefully, steadily
Your noble confessor there, God him save,

Shall hold his nose upright under the nave.
Then shall this churl, with belly stiff and tought* *tight
As any tabour,* hither be y-brought; *drum
And set him on the wheel right of this cart
Upon the nave, and make him let a fart,
And ye shall see, on peril of my life,
By very proof that is demonstrative,
That equally the sound of it will wend,* *go
And eke the stink, unto the spokes' end,
Save that this worthy man, your confessour'
(Because he is a man of great honour),
Shall have the firste fruit, as reason is;
The noble usage of friars yet it is,
The worthy men of them shall first be served,
And certainly he hath it well deserved;
He hath to-day taught us so muche good
With preaching in the pulpit where he stood,
That I may vouchesafe, I say for me,
He had the firste smell of fartes three;
And so would all his brethren hardily;
He beareth him so fair and holily."
The lord, the lady, and each man, save the frere,
Saide, that Jankin spake in this mattere
As well as Euclid, or as Ptolemy.
Touching the churl, they said that subtilty
And high wit made him speaken as he spake;
He is no fool, nor no demoniac.
And Jankin hath y-won a newe gown;
My tale is done, we are almost at town.

Notes to the Sompnour's Tale

1. Trentals: The money given to the priests for performing thirty masses for the dead, either in succession or on the anniversaries of their death; also the masses themselves, which were very profitable to the clergy.
2. Possessioners: The regular religious orders, who had lands and fixed revenues; while the friars, by their vows, had to depend on voluntary contributions, though their need suggested many modes of evading the prescription.
3. In Chaucer's day the most material notions about the tortures of hell prevailed, and were made the most of by the clergy, who preyed on the affection and fear of the survivors, through the ingenious doctrine of purgatory. Old paintings and illuminations represent the dead as torn by hooks, roasted in fires, boiled in pots, and subjected to many other physical torments.
4. Qui cum patre: "Who with the father"; the closing words of the final benediction pronounced at Mass.
5. Askaunce: The word now means sideways or asquint; here it means "as if;" and its

force is probably to suggest that the second friar, with an ostentatious stealthiness, noted down the names of the liberal, to make them believe that they would be remembered in the holy beggars' orisons.
6. A Godde's kichel/halfpenny: a little cake/halfpenny, given for God's sake.
7. Harlot: hired servant; from Anglo-Saxon, "hyran," to hire; the word was commonly applied to males.
8. Potent: staff; French, "potence," crutch, gibbet.
9. Je vous dis sans doute: French; "I tell you without doubt."
10. Dortour: dormitory; French, "dortoir."
12. The Rules of St Benedict granted peculiar honours and immunities to monks who had lived fifty years — the jubilee period — in the order. The usual reading of the words ending the two lines is "loan" or "lone," and "alone;" but to walk alone does not seem to have been any peculiar privilege of a friar, while the idea of precedence, or higher place at table and in processions, is suggested by the reading in the text.
13. Borel folk: laymen, people who are not learned; "borel" was a kind of coarse cloth.
14. Eli: Elijah (1 Kings, xix.)
15. An emperor Jovinian was famous in the mediaeval legends for his pride and luxury
16. Cor meum eructavit: literally, "My heart has belched forth;" in our translation, (i.e. the Authorised "King James" Version - Transcriber) "My heart is inditing a goodly matter." (Ps. xlv. 1.). "Buf" is meant to represent the sound of an eructation, and to show the "great reverence" with which "those in possession," the monks of the rich monasteries, performed divine service,
17. N'ere thou our brother, shouldest thou not thrive: if thou wert not of our brotherhood, thou shouldst have no hope of recovery.
18. Thomas' life of Ind: The life of Thomas of India - i.e. St. Thomas the Apostle, who was said to have travelled to India.
19. Potestate: chief magistrate or judge; Latin, "potestas;" Italian, "podesta." Seneca relates the story of Cornelius Piso; "De Ira," i. 16.
20. Placebo: An anthem of the Roman Church, from Psalm cxvi. 9, which in the Vulgate reads, "Placebo Domino in regione vivorum" — "I will please the Lord in the land of the living"
21. The Gysen: Seneca calls it the Gyndes; Sir John Mandeville tells the story of the Euphrates. "Gihon," was the name of one of the four rivers of Eden (Gen. ii, 13).
22. Him that harrowed Hell: Christ. See note 14 to the Reeve's Tale.
23. Mr. Wright says that "it was a common practice to grant under the conventual seal to benefactors and others a brotherly participation in the spiritual good works of the convent, and in their expected reward after death."
24. The friar had received a master's degree.
25. The regular number of monks or friars in a convent was fixed at twelve, with a superior, in imitation of the apostles and their Master; and large religious houses were held to consist of so many convents.